DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 294 197 CS 211 181

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TITLE Quality of Life in Writing Program Administration.
PUB DATE Mar 88
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (39th, St. Louis, MO, March 17-19, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Responsibility; Administrator Role; *College Programs; *English Departments; Higher Education; *Program Administration; Program Design; Program Improvement; *Writing (Composition); Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Because the structure of a writing program establishes its content and values, a writing program should be integrated with other aspects of English studies to avoid being merely an add-on to the college English department. Several planning strategies can assist in promoting this integration. A writing program should involve all related campus activities and constituencies, including coordination with writing centers, honors programs, business communication courses, and other relevant courses and programs. Secondly, administrators can develop an integrated, comprehensive writing program by cataloguing all existing aspects of writing instruction on campus, an exercise which could highlight needed program components. Writing program administrators should develop programs in which they would want to participate as students. In addition, the program should be specific to local needs and aspirations, based on student, faculty, and community expectations. Planning is important, but should be viewed as a continuous process, progressing simultaneously with evaluation and action. Finally, staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, theory, research, and evaluation are all integral to a comprehensive writing program, and are interdependent elements in a successful program. (Two references are appended.) (MM)

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QUALTITY OF LIFE IN WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

PRESENTED AT CCCC CONVENTION
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI
MARCH 17-19, 1988

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Circumstances often conspire to keep current problems on our immediate agenda, and thus challenges become problems for crisis management rather than opportunities for educational leadership. Several problems exist in varying degrees in most writing programs, and they include such issues as: promotion and tenure battles with senior literature faculty; growing numbers of students enrolling in writing courses and the increasing numbers of part-timers, lecturers, TAs, and other non-regular faculty required to teach them; increasing expectations and responsibilities for writing programs--assessment and testing, writing across the curriculum, upper-level writing requirements, outreach to the schools, expanded roles for writing centers--without a corresponding increase in tenure-track faculty.

Often efforts to promote growth and change in writing programs are thwarted by the prevailing notion that all college-level writing instruction is remedial. Those who promote this misconception are rarely heard to state that because students have had twelve previous years of reading instruction, that they should have mastered this skill by the time they enter college, that all they really need for most courses is a list of readings. These problems are not going to go away soon, of course. But when such problems are considered within the context of the challenge to leadership rather than as problems to manage and massage, WPAs can begin to develop a philosophy and a strategy for administration that is educationally sound and politically astute.

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I want to consider one proposition and several strategies that enable WPAs to develop an administrative style which promotes effective and imaginative leadership. Needless to say, the experience we gain in administering complex entities like writing programs is also useful for other administrative tasks--like chairing departments, deaning colleges, or provosting universities, an assumption verified by the numbers of WPAs nationwide assuming leadership positions. College administrators do have power and do make a difference, and one hope for improvement in the status of writing programs is the earned wisdom of WPAs who accept other administrative positions. However, directing a writing program is not only a stepping stone on the ladder of bureaucratic success. The experience of administering well provides options for involvement and leadership in academic matters throughout one's career. It provides an activist voice for an individual's teaching talent and research expertise.

The one concept I will consider, which will be followed by some specific planning strategies, can be phrased this way:

The structure of a program establishes the content and the values of the program.

Gerald Graff's new book, Professing Literature, argues that the structure of English departments promotes particular content and values. The traditional "field-coverage" literature curriculum promotes our profession's agreements rather than disagreements, our history rather than our future. This situation "stems from the assumption that students should be exposed only to the results of the controversies of their teachers and educators and should be protected from the controversies themselves" (261). To apply Graff to writing programs, many of us view them as potentially powerful educational and political forces in education. As such, they may transform the way we study and teach language. Yet, writing programs are structured within English departments much the way

American Studies and other once innovative programs have been, with "patterned isolation," to use Graff's term (225). For political, economic, and historical reasons they originate within English departments, and when they develop to the status of programs rather than a haphazard collection of courses, they are simply added on to the existing department, which does not "have to adapt to them, quarrel with them, or recognize their existence to any sustained degree" (225). Thus writing programs may grow in status and visibility, but their potential to change English studies is minimized because they are kept isolated from literature programs. They are structured as add-ons to the English department, thus administratively reinforcing the belief that reading and writing are separate social and intellectual matters.

Here is a fact. During the 1983-84 academic year, "of the national enrollment in writing and literature courses" at the college level, 69% was in writing courses and 31% in literature courses (Huber and Young, 44). But what does it mean to fully staff a literature program to teach the 31%? You hire specialists in every period and every major figure in British and American literature. And what does it mean to fully staff a writing program to teach the 69%? You hire a specialist or two in rhetoric and composition and a legion of part-timers, lecturers, and graduate teaching assistants. Being saddled with a growing and significant writing program is not an opportunity to reorganize and transform English studies around reading, writing, interpretation and critical understanding, or around literacy studies, or around cultural criticism, but is rather an exercise in damage control--to reinforce the departmental structure and safeguard that the writing program does not contaminate the literature program. To be sure, a writing major may be required to take a hefty dose of literature courses, but the literature major does not need the same curricular balance. Our profession apparently wants students to understand that it is better to receive than to send messages. And courses

which attempt to integrate English studies are rare, are almost always an elective, isolated from the center of the curriculum as a special and esoteric thing to study. Such structures of staffing and curriculum will define the content and the values of the writing program. The program will be devalued because it is not central to the department, it is an add-on, it is staffed by not very important people. The content of the program is thus always beginning, never building on expertise, because the teachers are always being turned over, not to mention turned away. Writing-across-the-curriculum teachers develop knowledge about the rhetoric of a specific discipline, but then they move on, their three-year non-renewable contract expired, and the WPA begins again at the beginning.

Process/product theories and pedagogies have the potential to transform teaching in composition and literature, so does telecommunications and computer-intensive instruction. But if we put these innovations into traditional English departmental structures, innovation quickly becomes a mechanized routine of the status quo. Teachers decide whether the process approach or the product approach works best, and then give it to the students, rather than involving the students in the debate. We teach literacy skills to students without considering with them the ideological controversies concerning literacy in our society. Or students take courses in order to be remediated, or competentized (I apologize for those words--do you know that remediable is defined as meaning "having no legal remedy"--which may be a good place for a discussion of literacy to begin) by part-time, underpaid, marginal, and obviously academically powerless teachers. And when they do, we demonstrate over and over again the content and the values of the writing program.

If we don't want to build a program which is an add-on to the English department, whose only viable options appear to be servitude, dominance,

benign neglect, or perhaps separation into a distinct but equal department--and thus probably perpetuating the isolation and resistance to change characteristic of the English department, then we need to work for integration within English. In addition, this integration must create new departmental structures which better promote the transformed content and values of English studies.

Here are some planning strategies which may assist in this effort.

Develop a program which is inclusive rather than exclusive.

A writing program should seek to include all related campus activities and constituencies. A WPA should not plan for a program by making divisive decisions based on who qualifies to be in the program and who doesn't, or who comes under whose sphere or influence. Writing programs are frequently fractured on many campuses, the director of first-year English does not plan with the coordinator of advanced writing programs or the coordinator of sophomore literature, and beyond the department, there may be little coordination with writing centers, honors programs, business communication courses, or other relevant courses and programs. Administering a program should be similar to teaching a writing workshop class. WPAs need to stress participation, active learning, collaboration, consensus, not only in writing courses, but in the development of the writing program. We transfer theory to classrooms, but we also need to transfer familiar classroom pedagogies to administrative work.

Develop an integrated, comprehensive writing program.

One of the best ways to plan an integrated, comprehensive program is to list all existing aspects of writing instruction on campus. Such an exercise describes the existing writing program, however fractured, and can suggest program components which do or could support one another.

Such a list might have on it: required first-year writing courses, the writing assessment, the writing center, the computer laboratory, upper-level writing requirements or electives, the writing major and minor, the graduate option, the GTA program, writing/literature connections, connections to other disciplines such as speech, psychology, and computer science as well as writing across the curriculum, outreach programs to the schools, general education requirements, faculty development seminars, student internships with industry, and others. The benefit of developing such a catalog is in both the process and the product: it provides an important task for various parties to work together collaboratively to discover what resources are already in place and which ones may need developed as well as producing an overview document for further planning and coordination. Another result of such an exercise may be the documentation of how labor-intensive a writing program is, which in turn may suggest the need for several WPAs in a program or department, not just one or two.

Develop a program for yourself as a faculty member.

This version of the self-interest syndrome makes good educational and administrative sense. Imagine yourself happy and productive as a teacher in the program. Such an exercise establishes empathy, justice, and mercy for those who do teach in the program, and it constructs one happy alternative for your future. For example, if faculty members currently teach several courses of composition per term to a hundred students or more, and you can't imagine yourself happy or effective doing such teaching term after term, year after year, then you need to envision a constructive alternative and work to implement it. If you ask teachers to teach a five-credit course in composition for $600, as my wife, an itinerant part-timer, was recently asked to do, and you can't imagine yourself thriving, not to mention surviving, in such a situation, then you

need to develop workable alternatives and strategies for change. A corresponding point to this first suggestion is: **Develop a program in which you would want to be a student.** Such empathy may be our best guide to developing an effective program--in conception, in practice, in administration.

Develop a program specific to your local needs and aspirations.

To be sure, WPAs need to understand what is going on in writing program administration on the national level, and to understand the national political rhetoric in phrases such as "literacy and the national defense," "competency testing and industrial productivity," and "cultural literacy and impoverished souls." But working within the national context, WPAs need to identify and develop programs for local people and situations. Community colleges need not develop programs as state colleges do, nor even as other community colleges do. Urban institutions need not emulate ivy league institutions, nor liberal arts colleges emulate PhD universities. Because other English departments have only one or two faculty who specialize in rhetoric and composition, just as they have one or two faculty in Renaissance literature and Eighteenth Century literature, does not mean that all departments should use that model of staffing a program. Because some institutions discount publications on pedagogy at tenure time, or devalue coauthored or collaborative work, is no reason that your institution should. Each institution must construct a program which recruits and rewards faculty based on the expectations of its writing program within its institution. And because writing instruction, research, and administration is so labor intensive, individuals and programs should strive to integrate these components--teaching, research, administration--wherever possible. If they are successful at such integration, and if the results of the integration produce quality in

instruction, research, and administration, then the rewards need to follow which recognize such achievement.

Plan carefully, but be sure to act as you plan.

Planning is important, but we all know that planning is often overrated in academia. Unproductive committee meetings and obsolete planning commissions are familiar academic folklore. We should envision planning and evaluation as a single, continuous process. When planning is considered this way, you don't wait for the planning to be completed for action to be begun. As soon as there is consensus that change is necessary, change should be initiated based on current planning. Plans change as a result of productive actions, and actions are evaluated in such a way to stimulate further planning. Consider together what the writing program should be like in five or ten years, and then set about to gather a consensus for specific actions to realize the collective vision. You might agree that your program is in need of change, and additionally, that the whole educational enterprise is in need of transformation. Writing programs, because of their paradoxical position, at once central to a college education yet simultaneously on the fringe of academic structures, may be a catalyst for change and even transformation in the education as usual malaise. If an interpersonal and collaborative pedagogy is enhanced by interactive technology such as video and computers to create aggressive learners, then real change is possible.

I recently visited two computer intensive classes. In one telecommunications class, the teacher expressed her frustration with the students because they kept punching keys on the computers before them instead of listening to her. But in the second class in technical writing, the students and teacher together were learning how to use the technology and also how to write to elementary school students on the computer network. In the first example, the teacher wanted to transmit knowledge

and fill up the vessels in front of her, and the proximity of the computers appeared to subvert her intentions. In the second example, interaction among people and between people and machines involved both creating and communicating knowledge. Writing programs often take the lead within liberal arts in using technology in instruction, and this technology is one factor that holds the promise of educational change and transformation.

Staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, theory, research, and evaluation are all integral to a comprehensive writing program.

WPAs need to consider all of these elements as they plan and as they create administrative structures. In successful programs, these elements are interdependent on one another. Most of us tend to put our time and energy into the first three on the list--staffing, curriculum, pedagogy--because these areas constitute the pressing needs of day-to-day administration. Sections must be covered, TAs must be educated and nurtured, textbooks must be ordered. But we may fall into the trap of only shuffling people and paper, if we don't continuously consider these other areas of planning and administration--theory, research, and evaluation. It is not that everyone must agree on a particular theory of writing instruction, but that we recognize that all teachers and programs, even those that proudly deny it, act on theoretical assumptions. We also need to recognize that theoretical assumptions cohabit with departmental structures which often ignore and segregate them, often even co-opt well-intentioned and well-conceived programs in such a way that they obstruct rather then promote meaningful change. Our theoretical struggles about how people write, why people write, ought to be explicit in our writing courses.

All writing programs should have a research component. If the time and resources exist, research which makes a contribution to the profession's knowledge should be encouraged, but, no matter what the

existing resources, research on the local program itself must be conducted, or the program has no way of seeing itself, of understanding its reason for being. Collaborative teaching and research projects can report on how students are learning to write within your program, collaborative research projects between students and teachers can develop your community's understanding of what the writing program is, and is not, what it might be, what its connections are to the rest of the curriculum, to the students' personal and professional lives, to the teachers' personal and professional lives .

My final suggestion is to integrate evaluation into every facet of the writing program. Evaluation of how goals are being accomplished--are class sizes being reduced--what are the numbers? Evaluation of how well the program is serving the students, the teachers, the college. Evaluation of how well the program is being administered. When evaluation is a continuous process, the results of which are immediately integrated into the daily life and administration of the program, then evaluation becomes a necessary component of a perceptive, action-oriented writing program, one ready to assume campus leadership in educational matters, one capable of improving the quality of life for all it touches.

Works Cited

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